

The Blessedness of Inevitable Persecution

Matthew 5:10-12

Introduction – We come to the final Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, the one that, at first glance, no one looks forward to claiming. Maybe that is why Matthew records some additional teaching on it. The Beatitude is verse 10, and the following two verses are an exposition upon that subject. Remember, the Beatitudes describe the character of a disciple through the work of the Spirit, but here we see the results of righteousness. Jesus teaches that opposition is the *normal* mark of being his disciple, as normal as hungering and thirsting after righteousness, or being merciful.

The Text – “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

Some Qualifications – Notice Christ does not say “Blessed are those who are persecuted for being obnoxious.” The qualification is that you are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and for Christ’s sake. 1 Peter 4:12-16 reiterates this teaching and amplifies the warning.

Why is Persecution Inevitable? Historically this has been true. But it remains true today. First, we must remember that regardless of how you read the statistics, the fact remains that many Christians are persecuted for their faith throughout the world today. But there is a second reason (John 15:20, 2 Tim 3:12, Acts 14:22). We should be convinced of the deep tension between the ways of the world and of the ways of the Christian. When we live for His sake, we display the antithesis of light and darkness (John 3:20-21).

So Where is the Persecution? We are either hiding our light under a bushel, concealing the offense of the cross (Gal 5:11, 6:12-13), or we are causing people to move either towards opposition or conversion. It doesn’t always happen immediately, as we see when the Pharisees were hindered, fearing the crowds.

“Blessed are you...” When Christ expands this Beatitude, He makes it personal, pointing to those who would become His apostles.

And He was right to do so:

James, the son of Zebedee, was beheaded in Jerusalem.

John, his brother, was exiled to the island of Patmos.

Thomas was killed in India.

Simon Peter was crucified, head down, during Nero’s reign.

Simon the Canaanite, who preached the gospel in Africa and then to Britain, was crucified.

Bartholomew was beaten, crucified, and beheaded, in Armenia.

Andrew, Peter’s brother, was crucified in Egypt.

Matthew was killed by means of a spear in Egypt. And, in addition,

Mark was burned in Egypt, and Paul was beheaded in Rome.

No wonder Paul could quote so generally “*For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*” (Rom 8:36).

This is the cost of discipleship (Luke 14:25-33) and those looking for an easy religion need not apply. Persecutions come by the hand, but by the tongue as well (Matt 5:11), and examples abound. David’s name became a song of mockery (Ps 69:11-12), Paul was slandered (Rom 3:8), and Jesus was accused of having a devil (John 8:48).

The Gift of Persecution – We must remember this gift comes by God’s decree (1 Thess 3:3), and by His design (James 1:2-4)

Rejoice – We are commanded to be joyful about our persecutions. Not only that, ‘*exceedingly glad*’ has the idea of jumping up and down for joy – ‘O Boy! Here they come’. Our first reaction must not be to retaliate or defend ourselves or our reputation. Our first reaction is to shout for joy and receive our gift (Acts 5:41, Phil 1:29). We rejoice because we are being treated like Christ, proving who we are, where we are going, and procuring the great rewards to come.

Rewards – It is unscriptural to ignore the promise of rewards and to live ‘the Christian’ life for the sake of obedience alone. There will be no sense of loss in heaven, but mysteriously to us today, there will be great rewards according to the sufferings we faithfully endure here (Matt 19:29, 2 Cor 4:17-18).

Conclusion – We pray for a reformation, but reformation has never come without bloodshed. We must practice in the little trials, giving thanks in all things. We may enjoy this present world, but we must not love it (2 Tim 4:10). We must practice a constant heavenly mindedness, keeping our ultimate goal and reward always before us (Heb 11:13-16, 12:1-2).